

25-27 East Hanover Street
(Commercial Building)
Trenton
Mercer County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-971

HABS
NJ,
11-TRET,
16-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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Location: 25-27 East Hanover Street, Trenton, Mercer County,
New Jersey

Last Owner: Plapinger-Platt Down Town Properties.
Trenton, New Jersey

Last Occupant: 25 East Hanover - American Radio.
27 East Hanover - Dr. Scholl's Foot Comfort Shoes.

Last Use: Commercial

The building at 25-27 East Hanover Street was demolished in
September 1987 to make way for new commercial construction.

Significance: For many years under different managements, this
building contained a fine restaurant and small
hostelry in the shadow of Trenton's large downtown
hotels. Under the management of the Hildebrecht's,
father and son, it was Trenton's leading restaurant
at the close of the 19th century, and the beginning
of the family's great local success in the
restaurant, catering, and hotel management fields.

The three story commercial building was erected in
1881, reusing the foundations of an earlier building
on the site. Although the first floor storefronts
have suffered from insensitive alterations, the
original eclectic ornamentation of the building
survives in the upper stories. This includes molded
window lintels, pedimented on the second floor, a
bracketed pressed metal cornice with corner finials,
and an interior staircase with the incised motifs
typical of Queen Anne and Eastlake design.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1881-82
2. Architect: Not Known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Chain of Title references from the Mercer County Hall of records:
 - 1881 December 12 - Transfer from Adam and Caroline Fischer, husband and wife, to Alexander V. Manning. Deed book 130 page 463.
 - 1890 March 18 - Transfer from Alexander V. Manning and Hattie M. his wife to George Hildebrecht. Deed book 171 page 452.
 - 1904 February 29 - Transfer from Rosa and Charles Hildebrecht, Executors of George Hildebrecht deceased to J. Fred Margerum. Deed book 269 page 395.
 - 1910 December 9 - Transfer from J. Fred Margerum and Belle D. his wife to Robert Steel Medary. Deed book 331 page 461.
 - 1912 May 28 - Sheriff's deed to James J. McGoogan. Deed book 348 page 40.
 - 1913 April 30 - Transfer to Rudolph V. Kuser (no consideration). Deed book 371 page 73.
 - 1925 January 2 - Transfer from Rudolph Kuser and Johanna his wife to James Rauch. Deed book 552 page 129.
 - 1932 December 14 - Sheriff's deed to River Holding Company, a New Jersey corporation. Deed 703 page 392.
 - 1940 December 20 - Transfer from River Holding Company to Hanover, Inc., a New Jersey corporation. Deed book 812 page 309.
 - 1950 December 8 - Transfer from Hanover, Inc. to Henry and Frances Kaplan and Albert B. and Catherine Kahn. Deed book 1130 page 152.
 - 1960 January 30 - Transfer from Henry and Frances Kaplan and Albert B. and Catherine Kahn to Frances Kaplan and Catherine Kahn. Deed book 1530 page 496, 500.
 - 1979 October 1 - Transfer from Frances Kaplan, widow, Catherine and Albert Kahn husband and wife, to Mervyn J. Platt, Wallace R. Plapinger and Allan R. Plapinger partners trading as Plapinger-Platt Down Town Properties. Deed book 2115 page 576.
 - 1987 September - Transfer from Plapinger-Platt Down Town Properties to DKM Properties Corp.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not Known.
 5. Original plans and construction: Not Known.
 6. Alteration and additions: The first floor incorporating two separate storefronts is known to have been altered in 1946; any earlier alterations to the original appearance of the building are unknown.
- B. Historical Context: With the first mention of a structure on this site, in the 1867 Trenton City Directory, the association of this location with fine food was made. At that time, the Levitt house restaurant occupied the first floor, and the proprietor lived above. The building at this address was one constructed between 1835 and 1849, according to information provided by city maps. In 1870, the building on the site of 25 East Hanover was purchased by Alexander Manning. Eleven years later, Manning also purchased the buildings at 27 and 29 East Hanover, and apparently constructed a trio of identical commercial buildings on the site, reusing the stone foundations of the earlier structure. Late in the year 1881, he sold the easternmost unit of his block, (29 East Hanover Street, HABS NJ-973) and joined the remaining two structures internally. For the next century, 25-27 East Hanover was considered one building in the city directories and for purposes of buying and selling the property, although the two portions of the building retained separate block and lot numbers for tax purposes.

The first tenant in Manning's new building was another restaurant. Albert Brandt ran an "Oyster and Chop House" there from 1882 to 1890. His advertisements in city directories noted that he featured "fine imported and domestic cigars", "liquors, etc." including "Ballentine's Export Beer, Claret and Rhine Wines, by the bottle or by the dozen, pure sheries and ports, and pure Knickerbocker gin [and]...Bass's Ale and Guinness Brown Stout".

At the same time, George Hildebrecht operated a saloon next door, at 29 East Hanover Street. In 1890, he bought 25-27 East Hanover, and apparently took over the management of Brandt's restaurant. For a few years he retained the old name, but by the time of the 1898 directory, he advertised a hotel and restaurant under his own name. His reputation grew rapidly, and in 1900, his directory advertising read "The Name Hildebrecht Stands for all that's Good to Eat or Drink ... Only One Place, 25 and 27 East Hanover".

Hildebrecht's fame grew in Trenton, as much for the German cooking and beer as for the gathering of local businessmen and politicians there. Newspapers of the turn of the century rarely mention a testimonial dinner, a holiday celebration, or a social club annual meeting that was not held at Hildebrecht's.

George Hildebrecht died in 1903, and the building was sold to J. Fred Margerum, but Hildebrecht's son continued to operate the restaurant until 1909. Charles Hildebrecht then launched the very successful Hildebrecht Catering Company, and in the 1920's built the Hotel Hildebrecht, which was Trenton's largest hotel for over a generation. Meanwhile, Margerum continued to rent the building on East Hanover Street to a restaurant with a German flavor, "The Bismark Cafe" operated by Gustave Juncker.

The Bismark Cafe moved next door to 29 East Hanover in a few years, to be succeeded by Weinmann's German Restaurant and Cafe. Anti-German sentiment of World War I did not seem to affect the business, which was still operative in 1919, but the decline of the nearby Trenton House Hotel (HABS NJ-960) in the 1920s did. Newer, more modern hotels and restaurants were built a few blocks to the south and east, and drew business away from the East Hanover Street area of Trenton. By the 1930s the restaurants were gone; the building housed Hill's Billiard Parlor.

Although remaining under one ownership, two separate storefronts were carved out of the building in 1946. The Dr. Scholl's Foot Comfort Shop operated from the first floor of 27 East Hanover from 1946 to 1976. The American Radio Company had a showroom and sales office in the storefront of 25 East Hanover, and used the upper floors for repair work, storage, and offices.

The building was recorded in a City-sponsored historic sites survey of the North Ward of Trenton in 1980. At that time the vacant building sported a hanging vertical sign advertising American Radio which has since disappeared.

Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. A three-story commercial building containing two separate storefronts. The storefronts reflect changes to

the building made in the mid-20th century; the upper floors retain their original eclectic design and suggest that the building was a commercial establishment of some style in the latter 19th century. The pressed metal cornice with corner finials and the pedimented window lintels are the building's most notable feature.

2. Condition of fabric: structural damage is evident in the cracking patterns of the facade, and the interior has been severely damaged by water infiltration and pigeon infestation. Lack of maintenance and prolonged vacancy especially on the upper floors of 27 East Hanover have left it in poor condition.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The East Hanover Street facade is 40.58' long. The building extends into the block for a maximum depth of 63.17'. The building has an irregular trapezoidal shape. It is divided on the first floor into two separate units, and 27 East Hanover is smaller in every dimension than 25 East Hanover.
2. Foundation: The foundation is rough fieldstone with a brick interior wall dividing the two sections of the building.
3. Walls: The facade walls of the building are made of pressed red brick laid in a common bond pattern, with thin "butter" mortar joints. Other walls of the building may only be seen from the interior; they are made of common red brick. The red brick facade was painted white in the past; at present, the paint is thin and coming off the bricks.
The building is divided into five bays on the upper floors; two over 27 and three over 25 East Hanover Street. A visible seam or break in the brickwork is the only articulation of the two units of the building on the upper floors.
4. Structural system: The masonry walls are load-bearing, as is an interior wall marking the division between 25 and 27 East Hanover Street. The relatively narrow width of each section of the building eliminated the need for other interior supports. The framing is of wood, with steel beams added into the interior of 25 to help support the third floor.

5. Storefront, stoops, bulkheads: Each storefront is composed of a recessed center door between two large plate glass windows. The floor of this storefront recess is finished with small octagonal tiles laid with a geometric patterned border. Large yellow metal signs fill the area between the top of the store windows and the sills of the second floor windows.
6. Chimneys: None
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The storefronts of both 25 and 27 East Hanover have been extensively altered and are presently boarded shut. However, it is apparent that the storefront is of mid-20th century date, with large glass windows set in a porcelain enamel border, flanking a center, recessed doorway. The door and window frames are metal, although the door itself is gone.
 - b. Windows: Upper floor windows are plain 1/1 double hung wood sash, with a painted galvanized metal molded window sill featuring embossed rosettes on each end of the sill. Above the second floor windows are triangular metal pediments containing a stylized floral or sunrise motif in the tympanum. The window cornice contains a sawtooth design. Small consoles are found at either side of the cornice. The third floor windows have a simple molded lintel on brackets, also of painted galvanized metal.
8. Roof: The gently pitched gable roof is covered with composition roofing paper and roofing tar. The roof pitch and ridgeline are continuous across 25, 27 and 29 East Hanover Street. A large metal cornice projects from the facade and hides the roof from street level. The cornice is marked by evenly spaced brackets and a projecting sheet metal corner finial at the west side of the building.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: Low, stone-walled, and largely unfinished space. Complete investigation not carried out due to possible structural failure of stairs.

- b. First floor: Divided into two storefronts by a brick wall. The long narrow interior of 25 East Hanover is finished with plaster walls and a pressed metal ceiling. Linoleum tile now covers the floor. It retains no elements of architectural interest, and no remnants of its commercial use. The first floor interior of 27 was inaccessible at the time of recording.
 - c. Second floor: A brick wall runs down the center, dividing 25 and 27 East Hanover. The two sections of the building are connected by a wide doorway. There are no room divisions on the second floor. The open space is fitted with work tables around the perimeter of 25, and with simple wooden shelving in 27. The long, open room at 25 is lighted at the rear by a large skylight. The rear half of 27 has been closed off with modern wallboard to form a storage area with locked door.
 - d. Third floor: Accessible only above 25 East Hanover. Now divided into several small rooms used as offices or storage, the original configuration of the third floor is unclear. Rooms open off a corridor running along the west wall of the building. The room divisions are both lath and plaster and vertical planks. A 20th century toilet room and washroom have been added in the room at the head of the stairs.
2. Stairways: Only one interior stairway was noted, located along the west wall of the building, and extending in a straight run up to the second and third floors. From the first floor, the wooden staircase has had its original balusters replaced by a solid plywood one. The original elements survive on the stair from the second to the third floors. This includes a blocky turned newel post typical of the late 19th century, turned balusters, and molded exterior stringer. Simple, open tread steps descend to the basement beneath the main staircase.
 3. Flooring: The first floor is covered with linoleum tile. The upper floors are finished with oak strip flooring 3" wide on the second floor and 4" wide on the third floor.
 4. Walls and ceilings: The walls are plastered, and the ceilings are generally pressed metal installed over the original plaster. The second floor ceiling, stamped with

a circle in a square motif, is complemented by a pressed metal covered cornice. The pressed metal was even installed over steel beams apparently added to provide extra support to the third floor. The walls of the second floor light well are covered with galvanized metal stamped with a repeating fleur-de-lis pattern. The third floor ceiling is plaster over lath.

5. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: No doors survive on the first floor; openings are boarded shut. On the second floor, a six panel door (three vertical panels above the door knob level rail and three below) lead to the rear storage area of 27 East Hanover. The doors on the third floor are typical 19th century 4-panel configuration.
- b. Windows: The building is surrounded by other structures, so there are no exterior windows except those visible on the facade. To light the rear of the second floor, a skylight was installed behind the third floor rear wall. It is not original construction, although the date of its insertion cannot be determined. The shed roofed wire mesh glass skylight is above a clerestory of 3-light wooden casement windows, with interior metal bars attached to the wooden window frames.

6. Decorative features and trim: There is little decorative trim surviving anywhere in this building. The second floor facade windows have simple molded frames. Around the front of 25 East Hanover, wooden benches made of modern 2x4's with linoleum-topped work surfaces face the perimeter walls. The benches are fitted with double electrical outlets along their lower face; pegboard and shelving above was apparently designed to hold tools and supplies.

7. Hardware: Little historic hardware is evident, save the ceramic doorknobs found on some doors on the third floor. Door hinges and window locks are strictly functional, and appear to be later (mid-20th century) replacements.

8. Mechanical Equipment:

Heating: Steam heat was generated from a furnace in the basement, and iron radiators stood on each floor.

Lighting: Modern electrical wiring was run across the center of the second floor ceiling in a metal pipe, with connections to outlets and bare bulbs. An earlier electrical system is in evidence by the few remaining metal bases of ceiling lights. These bronzed metal fixtures had globes (none of which survive) hanging in a row down the center of the room.

Plumbing: One washroom/toilet served the building, located at the top of the stairs on the third floor. Fixtures are functional, with simple porcelain wash basins and toilets. These appear to date from the mid-20th century.

D. Site:

1. General siting and orientation: The building stands within the north side of the block defined by East State Street, North Broad Street, East Hanover Street, and North Warren Street in Trenton, New Jersey. This block was known in the 20th century as the "Dunham Block" for a large downtown department store which was the most prominent business in the area. By its narrow width and one-way traffic pattern, East Hanover Street has become a quiet side street in the past thirty years. Number 25 and 27 East Hanover Street faces north, and fills its lot except for a narrow air shaft to the rear. Immediately adjacent to the building to the east is 29 East Hanover Street, and to the west, the rear of the Trenton House Hotel, located on the corner of East Hanover and Warren Streets.
2. Historic landscape design: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: Not Known.
- B. Early Views: Not Known.
- C. Interviews: None.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

- a. Real Estate Transactions, Mercer County Hall of Records, Trenton, New Jersey.
- b. Tax assessment records, Tax Office, City of Trenton.

2. Secondary and published sources:

a. Books

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b. Periodicals

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c. Maps

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Gordon, Thomas. Map of the City of Trenton and Its Vicinity. Philadelphia: J.F. and C.A. Watson Lithographers, 1836.

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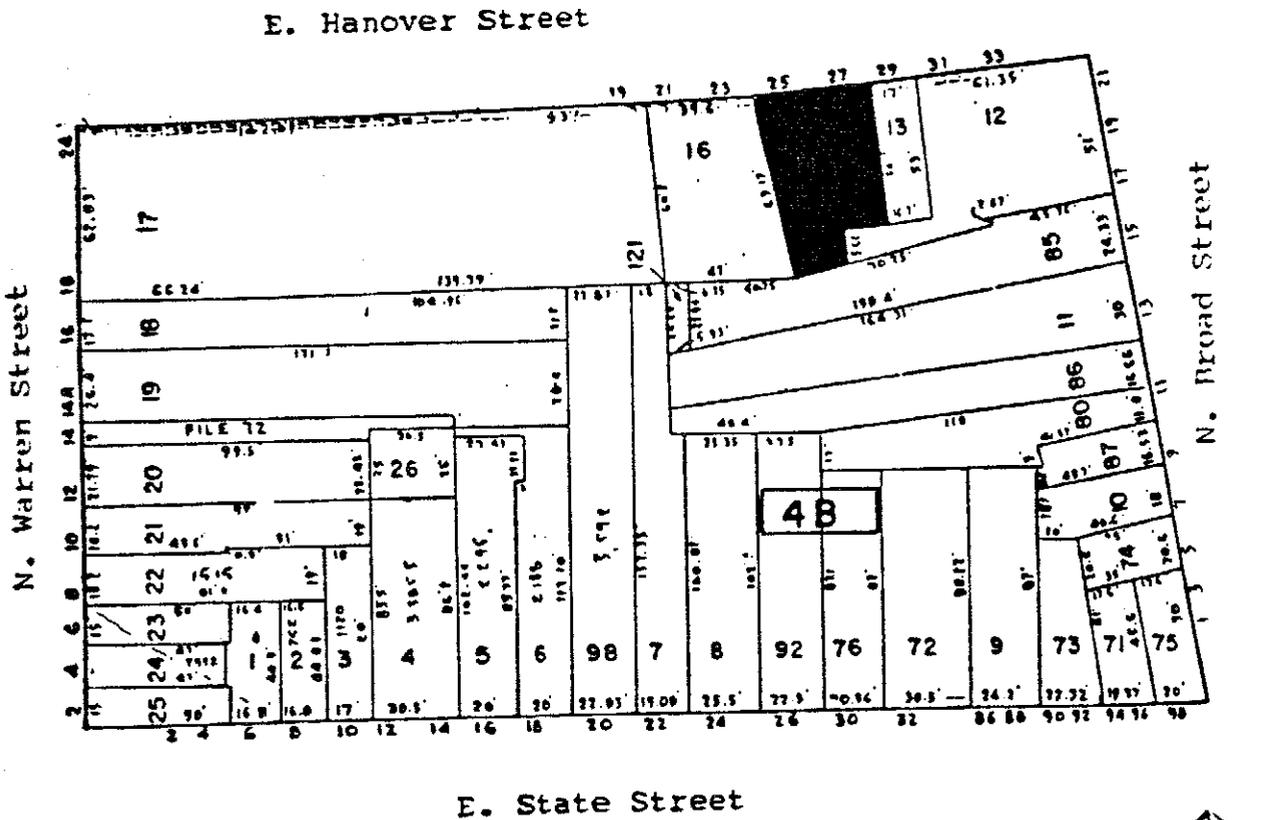
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Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation for 25-27 East Hanover Street was prepared for DKM Properties Corp. under an agreement with the City of Trenton, the Office of New Jersey Heritage, and DKM Properties Corp. The site was recorded to HABS standards to mitigate the loss of historic buildings, impacted by a project utilizing funds from HUD through an Urban Development Action Grant. The site is under development by DKM Properties as the Capital Center project, a mixed retail and office building containing 331,000 square feet.

Prepared by: Janet W. Foster
Title: Historic Preservation Consultant
Affiliation: ACROTERION
71 Maple Avenue
Morristown, N.J. 07960
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Site Plan



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Floor Plan

